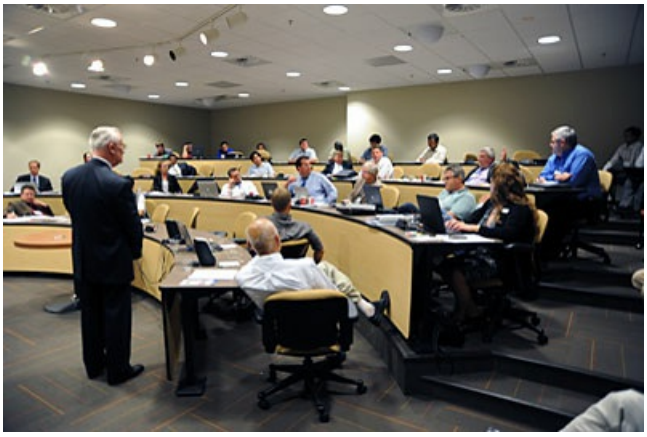

More than 60 people met recently at INL's Center for Advanced Energy Studies to discuss forming a National Science Foundation industry/university cooperative at the Radioactive Materials Processing Center.

CAES works to establish industry/university cooperative

by Kortny Rolston, *INL Communications*

Business, industry and university leaders met at Idaho National Laboratory's Center for Advanced Energy Studies last month about forging a new alliance to conduct radioactive materials research.

More than 60 people attended the two-day June workshop to learn how industry could partner with CAES, Boise State University and University of Utah in the group's Radioactive Materials Processing Center (RAMP-C). Participants also discussed the benefits of such a partnership.

The event was part of the ongoing effort to have RAMP-C designated a National Science Foundation industry/university cooperative. The National Science Foundation established the research centers in the 1960s as a way for universities and industry to collaborate on various projects. The agency provides start-up money for five to 10 years to help the cooperatives get established.

"It went well. We had a lot of industry, INL and university support," said Dr. Darryl Butt, head of BSU's Materials Science and Engineering Department.

CAES is a partnership between INL and Idaho's three public research universities.

Butt and other organizers applied to the cooperative program last year and made it through the first round. The agency awarded them $20,000 to hold the June planning session.

"We've made it past the first two hurdles," Butt said. "Now we have to submit another proposal and prove we have enough commitments from businesses to make this work."

Industry buy-in is key to earning the designation. A certain number of businesses have to agree to invest money in the cooperative in order for the National Science Foundation to consider it.

What is RAMP-C?

The Radioactive Materials Processing Center (RAMP-C) is a joint venture between Boise State University, Utah State University and CAES. RAMP-C's research is focused on developing efficient, recyclable nuclear fuels that can't be used to manufacture weapons; nuclear fuels that could power shuttles during space missions and nuclear medicine.

Learn more about RAMP-C.

Rathindra DasGupta of the National Science Foundation said the cooperatives are designed to benefit both industry and the universities. Because the agency helps cover the overhead, it requires universities to conduct research for companies at a lower cost. In exchange, students work on real-world projects and industry gains access to experienced faculty and labs that might otherwise be too expensive.

The model is a proven one, DasGupta said. Most of the centers are now operating on their own without any money from the agency.

"These cooperatives allow universities and industry to come together and embark on research that is mutually beneficial to both," DasGupta told workshop participants.

Now that the workshop is over, Butt and other organizers are working to secure funding from some of the companies that attended. Once they have those commitments, they will submit a second proposal to the National Science Foundation.

Butt is optimistic RAMP-C will make the final cut.

"That we've gotten this far is encouraging," he said. "The National Science Foundation has not always funded radioactive material research in the past. That was considered something the Department of Energy did. This shows they think our center is viable."

If the agency does decide to fund RAMP-C, it will become the first National Science Foundation industry/university cooperative in the region and the first to focus on radioactive materials.

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